

THE ROLE OF PARTICIPANT TRAINING IN BUILDING
SOCIAL SCIENCE CAPABILITIES IN ASIA

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FOREWORD

Since its inception, the U.S. Agency for International Development (A.I.D.) has provided support for overseas training of Third World nationals. Its assistance has enabled hundreds of thousands of men and women from developing countries to acquire new skills and expertise through overseas training.

There is ample evidence to indicate that these trainees have been playing critical roles in the economic, social, and educational advancement of their societies.

A.I.D.'s Center for Development Information and Evaluation (CDIE), along with the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations, the Agricultural Development Council, and the International Development Center, funded a study to examine the contribution of overseas training to national capacity building in social science disciplines. This study, which was conducted by Abe Weisblat and Bryant Kearn, focused on Asian countries only.

The research methodology, findings, and recommendations of this study are being published by Winrock International Institute for Agricultural Development. However, in view of the wide interest in the subject, CDIE decided to publish a brief paper focusing on the findings and recommendations that have particular relevance to A.I.D.'s programs. This summary paper was prepared by Dr. Krishna Kumar, a senior analyst at CDIE.

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SUMMARY

An extensive study of the overseas participants' training programs funded by international foundations and the Agency for International Development (A.I.D.) suggests that such programs have largely succeeded in building indigenous social science capabilities all over Asia.

The study found that an overwhelming majority of the trainees were satisfied with the support provided by funding agencies for travel, immigration, health, family, and academic work. However, recent trainees (i.e., those who studied after 1975) were slightly less satisfied than the earlier ones. Most of the participants also expressed satisfaction with their training and found it to be quite useful to their work and profession.

The findings indicate that participants did not encounter major reentry problems. They adjusted easily to their home environments and work situations and did not expect or require any help from the funding sources. Adjustment to professional work was a different matter, however. Most participants faced difficulties in getting access to current books, professional

journals, and funds for research and overseas travel and felt the need for support from both national and international agencies for their professional advancement.

An overwhelming majority of the trainees returned home and continued to work there. Thus there is absolutely no evidence that overseas training contributed to migration of Asian social scientists to the United States or other industrialized countries. Many of the participants were occupying senior positions at the time of the study. They were secretaries, joint secretaries, and directors in governments; presidents, deans, and professors in universities and research organizations; chairpersons of public bodies and enterprises; and even top executives of business organizations.

A majority of the foundation trainees went to universities and research institutions, and most of the A.I.D. participants to jobs in government. Participants who joined educational institutions were involved in teaching graduate and undergraduate students, conducting field research, and consulting with national and international agencies. Even the participants who took administrative and technical jobs often taught courses and kept in touch with the academic community. On the whole, participants have made profound contributions to the growth of various social science disciplines and the legitimization of applied research for policy formulation and decision-making.

1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Since its inception, the Agency for International Development (A.I.D.), like other major international donor agencies, has invested heavily in the overseas training of Third World nationals. The primary objectives of its efforts have been to provide skills and expertise needed to (1) initiate, manage, and evaluate development interventions; (2) develop and sustain indigenous capabilities to study and examine social, economic, and policy issues and problems; and (3) institutionalize social and physical sciences in developing countries.

A.I.D.'s Center for Development Information and Evaluation, along with the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations, the Agricultural Development Council, and the International Development Center, funded a study to examine the contribution of overseas training to national capacity building in social science disciplines. The study, conducted by Abe Weisblat and Bryant Kearl, focused on Asian countries only. This paper briefly describes the study and its major findings, focusing primarily on those aspects that are of direct interest to A.I.D. staff and contractors.

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1 This report is primarily based on a study, "Building National Capacity in Social Sciences: Insights From Experience in Asia," by Abe Weisblat and Bryant Kearl. It is being published by Winrock International Institute for Agricultural Development.

Requests for copies should be addressed to Program Officer,
Human Capital Development, Winrock Foundation, Petit Jean
Mountain, Morrilton, Arkansas 72110.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

Weisblat and Kearl conducted a comprehensive survey of social scientists who received support for overseas graduate training by one of the above-mentioned funding agencies. Physical and biological scientists were excluded from the survey. Questionnaires were mailed to 1,506 participants in Asian countries including 562 A.I.D. trainees. Out of 601 trainees who completed and returned the questionnaire, 166 were A.I.D. participants. Although the study covered five countries, responding A.I.D. participants came from India and Indonesia only.

The questionnaire contained 44 questions that solicited information and opinions on a wide range of issues relating to the respondent's employment history, study program, and professional activities. It also sought demographic data. The questionnaires were coded and analyzed at Rutgers University. To add a comparative dimension, the authors analyzed separately the data for A.I.D. and for foundation respondents.

In addition, the authors interviewed 33 university leaders, government administrators, and private sector executives who had supervised some of the survey respondents. The purpose of the interviews was to obtain assessments of the performance and contributions of overseas-trained social scientists and to seek recommendations for the future.

Finally, the authors relied on their own experiences, correspondence, and personal notes, which covered three decades of international educational exchange.

3. MAJOR FINDINGS

3.1 Participant Training Process

Participants were asked whether, during their training, they had required assistance from the funding agency in travel, immigration, academic work, family problems, and health, and, if so, whether they had received adequate help. A majority of the trainees considered the assistance provided by their agencies as adequate. The areas in which they had needed help were usually travel and immigration. Only a few had sought assistance to resolve family problems. A.I.D. participants took a more favorable view of the help they received on family matters and were much less positive about assistance on health matters than participants from the foundations group. In any case, the study did not reveal

any major problem area.

Four out of five participants expressed satisfaction with their training program. The data about A.I.D. trainees are given in Table 1. Participants' levels of satisfaction were related to their appraisals of the assistance they had received from their agencies for travel, immigration, family, and so forth. Those who indicated that they had not needed this type of assistance or that the help they had received was adequate tended also to be those who described their overall fellowship experiences as satisfactory.

There was a difference between the earlier (before 1975) and recent (1975-1985) participants. Earlier graduates approved slightly more than the recent ones of the variety and range of courses offered, the guidance they received in the planning of their academic programs, the amount of contact they had with fellow students, and the level of services provided for foreign students.

Tab1e 1. Satisfaction With Major Program Decisions
(percentages)

	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Dissatisfied or Very Dissatisfied	
Choice of Major Field	65	23	6	6
Choice of University	64	24	5	7
Choice of Dissertation	67	21	12	1

Lack of proficiency in English created problems for participants. Because of language barriers, nearly 24 percent of all respondents experienced difficulties in participating in class discussions, reading assignments, writing papers and examinations, and communicating with instructors and fellow students. The most serious problems were faced by participants from countries where university instruction is not conducted in English. At least 44 percent of trainees from Indonesia, Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand reported such problems.

3.2 Reentry Problems

The participants were asked to describe the problems they encountered on their return. Such problems were classified in three categories -- personal, employment, and professional.

An overwhelming majority of the respondents did not encounter any personal problems on return. Even the problems mentioned most often -- financial settling in and logistical arrangements -- were described as serious by less than a quarter of the respondents. Other problems, such as adjustment to family obligations, traditional lifestyles, local cultural norms, and the political situation, were even less troublesome to most of the returnees.

Employment-related problems gave participants slightly more reason for concern. Lack of equipment, inadequate economic rewards, heavy workload, and lack of institutional interest in research were viewed as serious problems by more than a quarter of the participants.

It was in professional development that both foundation and A.I.D. respondents mentioned several problems and deficiencies. The A.I.D. participants, more than the foundation group, expressed concern about the nonavailability of professional books and journals, lack of opportunities to attend in-country and overseas professional meetings, and difficulties in getting information on developments in their profession and in organizing workshops and seminars. The data about the A.I.D. participants are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Problems of Professional Development
Encountered by the Participants
(percentages)

	Serious Problem	Minor Problem	No Problem
Opportunities to attend overseas meetings	64	31	5
Opportunities for further training	41	54	5
Funds for research	55	36	9
Availability of books and journals	55	42	3
Opportunities to attend in-country meetings	50	41	9

Surprisingly, recent returnees reported greater problems of readjustment (personal, employment and professional) than did the earlier ones, and the A.I.D. participants consistently reported more difficulty than did those supported by foundations. Only 9 percent of the foundation group and 15 percent of the A.I.D. group returning before 1975 experienced major reentry problems. The comparable figures for recent returnees were 10 percent and 22 percent.

3.3 Employment, Professional Roles, and Usefulness of Training

Returning A.I.D. participants were more likely than the foundation group to find employment in governmental agencies (41 percent compared with 12 percent). The foundation group gravitated toward employment in universities and research institutes. The explanation for this difference is that A.I.D. had primarily selected trainees from governmental agencies, people who were expected to assume managerial and technical positions on the successful completion of their programs. Foundations, on the other hand, were more flexible and recruited from both public and private sectors. In many instances, they focused on a few universities and research institutions and provided overseas training to bright, junior faculty members.

Irrespective of their official positions, a majority of foundation participants continued to teach. More than half supervised graduate students, and nearly one-third developed new courses and introduced changes in educational curriculum. A considerably lower proportion of the A.I.D. participants took to teaching, but of those who did, many performed well.

Participants as a group have been involved in social and economic research, but, because of their work in the governmental agencies, a smaller proportion of A.I.D. participants conducted research. Research ranged from designing studies to formulating findings and recommendations or simply supervising the fieldwork done by graduate students. Participants wrote articles, papers, and even books in their areas of expertise.

One essential element in maintaining professional capacity in the social sciences is contact with outside peer groups. Most of the respondents reported some contacts with professionals from industrialized as well as developing countries. They exchanged articles and literature and occasionally met in meetings and symposia. About 60 percent of the respondents were members of international professional organizations and received their journals. Whenever funds were available, they attended international meetings.

Returnees tended to maintain acquaintances made during their overseas stay. At least two-thirds of the respondents continued to have some contacts with staff members of the

funding agencies, fellow students, teachers, host families, and other friends in the communities in which they had studied.

Quite a few trainees held senior leadership positions in the public and private sectors. Such positions included secretaries of government agencies, directors of governmental bureaus and agencies, presidents of universities and research institutions, senior faculty members in universities and educational institutions, and even leaders in business and industry. Thus they exercised great power and authority in their societies.

Participants overwhelmingly indicated that the skills and knowledge they had acquired during their training proved to be valuable in their work settings. The data about the perceived usefulness of A.I.D. participants' training for their first and current jobs are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Usefulness of the Participant Training
(percentages)

	Extremely Valuable	Somewhat Valuable	Slightly Valuable	No Value	No Response
First Job	57	25	9	4	2
Current Job	54	33	8	2	1

The available data do not support the hypothesis that overseas-trained participants gravitate to industrialized nations, contributing to a brain drain. Nearly 97 percent of the participants from the foundation group returned home. The percentage was still higher for the A.I.D. participants because they were required to leave the United States at the completion of their training.

There was no evidence of later exodus, either. All of the A.I.D. respondents and 93 percent of the foundation group were currently employed in their home countries. It is, of course, quite possible that some of the participants who could not be reached for the survey were those who had migrated abroad. Even then, the data unmistakably show that an overwhelming majority of the participants returned home and continued to work there.

3.4 Overall Impact on Social Science Capacity Building

All the evidence presented in the study indicates that the

overseas training has richly contributed to the institutionalization of social sciences in Asian countries. In many instances, the returnees were the first to introduce a social science discipline or its subspecialties in their universities or even their countries. They taught and trained younger generations of social scientists are now involved in teaching and research.

One major contribution of the participants has been in building institutional capabilities to conduct applied research. In the past, Asian universities and institutes generally lacked such capabilities. Participants brought back home the much-needed expertise to lay the foundations for empirical research. Through teaching, research, and consultation, they initiated and sustained institutional research capacities and helped to legitimize the role of applied research in policy formulation and decision-making.

4. OUTSTANDING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Several issues that have direct implications for A.I.D.'s participant training activities emerge from the above discussion. The three most important among them are discussed in this section.

4.1 Underrepresentation of Women

Women were grossly underrepresented in participant training programs. They constituted only 12 percent of the respondents among the A.I.D. group and 17 percent among the foundation group. The reasons for this widespread neglect are complex and range from a low number of qualified women in Asia during the 1960s and 1970s to a lack of appreciation of women's role in agriculture and industry. Above all, there was and continues to be a societal expectation that women's career aspirations and plans revolve around marriage and motherhood. Host governments and funding agencies proceeded on the unspoken assumption that it is better to invest scarce educational resources in men than in women.

The situation is improving, albeit slowly. The pool of qualified women applicants for graduate study is growing, and donor agencies are now aware of the critical role that women can play in developmental initiatives. Moreover, as Asian societies industrialize and modernize, traditional attitudes towards women have been changing. As a result, tangible progress is being made in providing opportunities for overseas higher education to women. Nonetheless, the gender gap remains wide.

4.2 Language Training

As was indicated earlier, participants' lack of proficiency in English often hinders their educational and social activities. Greater emphasis should therefore be given to language training before trainees are sent to host countries, especially in societies in which the medium of instruction in universities is not English.

It is generally more cost-effective to take courses in home countries than in host countries.

4.3 Follow-Up Contacts

There was generally little contact between the former participants and funding agencies. The record of foundations was slightly better than A.I.D.; however much needs to be done. The trainees are a valuable resource for cross-cultural interactions between the host countries and the United States. Moreover, in many instances their skills and knowledge need to be upgraded so that they can play more productive roles. Suitable activities can be devised for this purpose.